



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

DDS

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Governor

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Commissioner

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**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
February 23, 2021**

Good Morning Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Jordan A. Scheff, Commissioner of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to testify in support of **H.B. No. 6439 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

The mission of DDS is to partner with the individuals we support and their families, to support lifelong planning and to join with others to create and promote meaningful opportunities for individuals to fully participate as valued members of their communities. More than 17,000 individuals are currently determined eligible for support from DDS and the department is committed to continuing to evolve in a way that allows us to support as many individuals as possible within available funding.

Although DDS began 2020 with the intent to expand our continuum of services and community integration, our priorities, like the rest of the nation's, rapidly changed. Over the past year, DDS staff, families, the individuals we support, and our provider network have experienced adversity like no other. The DDS community was forced to quickly adapt to a new way of life. I would be remiss not to say that it has been a difficult and challenging time, both personally and professionally, for our entire community. We have experienced hardship, heart-breaking loss and have been faced with immensely difficult decisions that had no decent options for resolution. It has been a trying time, but through it all, everyone in the DDS community - our dedicated staff (especially our direct support professionals who continued to show up to work every single day), our resilient individuals and families, and our amazing providers went above and beyond to keep everyone we support healthy and safe. I am forever appreciative and grateful to lead such an inspiring community. Thank you for your commitment and dedication. Together, and with the support and partnership of Governor Lamont, the Office of Policy and Management and the Connecticut General Assembly, we are working toward a brighter tomorrow.

DDS Accomplishments and Achievements

In past budget presentations, DDS would take this opportunity to discuss achievements and accomplishments over the past year. However, understanding the anomaly that the pandemic created this year, we would like to take this time to provide feedback received from our provider network, staff, and individuals and their families regarding the department's response to the pandemic and how we can improve going forward. DDS learned a lot over the past few months and, in response, we have begun taking the necessary steps and implementing the recommended improvements to create a healthier and safer future for everyone we support.

I am so pleased to tell you that overall, 93% of individuals and families and 89% of DDS staff and providers felt that DDS was able to continue to carry out our essential functions throughout the pandemic. Ninety percent of individuals and families and 81% of DDS providers and staff believed DDS did everything possible to prevent loss of life and the spread of COVID-19. For staff who were designated to work from home, over 99% were able to do so, aided by technology and flexibility in standard work practices.

Funding assistance was very important to DDS providers and the need for ongoing assistance was noted in the survey responses. With the support of the Coronavirus Relief Funds and other state aid, DDS was able to provide our qualified providers with enhanced payments and restructured rates to assist providers during this challenging time.

Case management was singled out as an area where DDS is doing well. Individuals and families also felt that the department's following of pandemic precautions and timely response to the pandemic were strengths, as was communication from case managers and DDS staff in general.

All groups were concerned with ensuring guidelines and precautions were followed, and another common concern identified was ensuring PPE availability and use. For staff, limited access to technology or internet connectivity led to some disruptions and there were concerns for the impact of COVID-19 on person-centered planning processes. Individuals and families experienced disruptions to daily routines, with many mentioning day programs being closed and staff shortages as some of the more challenging disruptions during the pandemic.

DDS continues to work on several fronts to mitigate these concerns and to address what was identified as recommended improvements. In terms of next steps, DDS plans to conduct feedback sessions with survey participants to learn more about their experiences. From there, a summary of recommendations will be presented to DDS leadership and shared on our website. We look forward to growing and learning from this experience.

Items of Interest in Governor Lamont's Proposed Budget

Governor Lamont's proposed budget provides an overall increase to the department's budget. This important investment ensures delivery of services for individuals with intellectual disability and provides for a continuum of creative initiatives that will help individuals with intellectual disability to live and thrive in their communities.

Caseload Growth

The Governor's proposed budget includes funding for caseload growth for individuals supported by DDS. These figures below do not include the annualization of FY 2021 case growth.

Specifically, within the Employment Opportunities and Day Services account, \$7.39 million is provided in FY 2022 and \$18.13 is provided in FY 2023 for caseload growth for employment opportunities and day service placements. This funding is projected to serve:

- 325 individuals in FY 2022 and 325 individuals in FY 2023 graduating from high school;
- 88 individuals in FY 2022 and 76 individuals in FY 2023 who will be aging out of services provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) or local education agencies (LEAs); and
- 20 individuals in FY 2022 and 20 individuals in FY 2023 transitioning through Money Follows the Person (MFP).

It is important to note that the DDS Residential Services Program is located in the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget in the line item “Community Residential Services”. The account was transferred to DSS in FY 2017 for the purpose of maximizing Medicaid reimbursement. DDS residential services are still contracted and operated under the purview of DDS. Therefore, items highlighted in this testimony also will include those represented in the DSS Community Residential Services account.

Within the DSS Community Residential Services account, \$7.71 million is provided in FY 2022 and \$20.66 million is provided in FY 2023 for caseload growth for residential placements. This funding is projected to serve:

- 90 individuals in FY 2022 and 69 individuals in FY 2023 who will be aging out of services provided by DCF or LEAs; and
- 30 individuals in FY 2022 and 30 individuals in FY 2023 transitioning through MFP, including Southbury Training School or court-ordered placements.

With funding provided in the Housing Supports and Services line item, and room and board funding to help offset support costs, DDS has been able to give 21 developmentally disabled young adults their first chance to live outside their families’ homes in the new Bear Woods apartments in Canton. This development was a collaborative effort between DDS, the Department of Housing, Favarh (a private provider agency) and Regan Development Corp. The individuals will be living in a new supportive housing model that was made possible through state and federal funding, private donations and tax incentives that reserves 10 apartments at Bear Woods exclusively for individuals funded by DDS. Individuals will be living on their own or with roommates being supported by on-site staff and with assistive technology.

Baseline Adjustments, Reductions and Opportunities for Savings

The Governor’s FY 2022 and FY 2023 budget recommends the following:

- Achieving \$4.14 million in savings by transitioning individuals to individualized supported employment services. This transition will occur over the biennium and will refocus on providing individuals with trainings and the opportunity to gain employment-based skills with the goal of obtaining employment.
- Annualizing FY 2021 rescissions of \$3.54 million.
- Achieving \$2.07 million in savings by hiring approximately 200 new part-time staff to fill vacancies currently being covered by full-time staff being paid overtime wages.
- Achieving \$1.03 million in savings by closing one public Community Living Arrangement.
- Adjusting funding to reflect natural attrition in the Behavioral Services Program of \$2.32 million.

The department would like to express our deepest thanks to all the DDS partners, including the legislature, for their ongoing commitment to individuals with intellectual disability. The department believes Governor Lamont’s proposed budget reflects the dedication of the various stakeholders that have worked so hard to advocate for the individuals we serve. We look forward to continuing our work together and expanding our ability to provide high quality services that support individuals with intellectual disability in achieving their personal goals within their communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Governor Lamont’s proposed budget. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have for me at this time and I look forward to working with all of you throughout the legislative session.